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THE CARIBOU OF THE KENAI PENINSULA, ALASKA.

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MALE CARIBOU, KENAI PENINSULA, ALASKA.
Shot by H. E. Lee, 5th September, 1898.

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By D. G. Elliot, F.R.S.E.

In an article lately published in the Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History, New York, vol. xiv, p. 143, Dr. J. A. Allen describes as a distinct species the caribou of the Kenai Peninsula, Alaska, his material being only the head and horns of a male obtained by Mr. A. J. Stone, after whom the animal is named. Dr. Allen bases his distinctive characters upon the dark color of the head; heavy fringe of white hair on the front of the neck, large size and peculiar form of the "anterior branch" of the antlers, and the "narrow and slender skull."

There has been for the past two years or more in the possession of Mr. H. E. Lee of this city, by whom it was shot in Alaska on the Kenai Peninsula, a complete mounted specimen of a very fine male caribou, and also a flat skin, without the head, of a cow killed at the same place and on the same day. A description of the bull is here given :

Male caribou shot by Mr. H. E. Lee on the Kenai Peninsula, Alaska, 5th September, 1898. End of nose extending back slightly beyond anterior border of nostrils, and all of lower lip in front, silvery white. Band across lower lip, posterior to the white and extending on to the nose behind nostrils (darkening this portion more than the rest), and upper part of nose and head to between the horns, dark chocolate brown. Cheeks and throat paler and of a redder brown ; a white ring around eyes ; rest of head and neck and fore part of shoulders mixed black and white, having a pepper and salt appearance (probably all white in winter), with a short whitish fringe in front of neck, lighter than the neck but not presenting a very strong contrast to it. Rest of body, legs and upper part of tail, dark reddish or chocolate brown, palest on the shoulders and front part of legs, and darkest on the belly, where it is a blackish brown. Inner

side of legs pale brown. Band above hoofs, under part and sides of tail, narrow space on haunches beneath the tail, and scrotum, white. Ears blackish brown. No caudal patch.

Antlers with both brow tines palmated. Number of points on antlers fifty-six, twenty-eight on each side. Measurements around burr, 172; along curvature, 1,156; greatest spread, 875; between tips of longest tines, 820; between tips of main beams, 680; breadth of palmation of right brow tine, 218; of left brow tine, 155. Height of animal at shoulder, taken in the flesh, 1,398; around neck behind ears, 863. Length from nose to root of tail (mounted specimen), 1,900.

On first looking at this example one is impressed by its uniform dark color, this hue extending over the entire under parts, and this is more remarkable from the fact that of all the known species of this genus there is none without some white on the belly, unless *R. dawsoni* may be an exception. This would seem to be a recognizable character if constant, and cause this animal to be rather conspicuous among other forms. Unfortunately, however, an inspection of the skin of the female discloses the fact that while the back is chocolate brown like that of the male, a large caudal patch and the belly are white, this hue extending even on to the sides of the body. It is hardly to be supposed that the sexes are distinguished by the presence or absence of white, but more probable that this hue is a variable quantity appearing in a greater or less degree on individuals without being influenced by any controlling cause. Of the characters mentioned by Dr. Allen as probably specific, it is evident that little dependence can be placed on the fringe on the lower part of the neck, as this is visible on most caribou, lengthening as the hairs grow to the shaggy, thick coat of winter, and is an appendage to a greater or less degree on the neck of the Canadian caribou (*R. caribou*), familiar to all hunters of that animal. Mr. Lee's specimen has a very moderate fringe, slightly lengthening at its lowest point. The "large size and peculiar form of the anterior branch" (by which, I suppose, that which would represent the "bez" is intended,) of the antler is not particularly remarkable in Mr. Lee's specimen whose photograph is here given, although it is exceedingly well developed, and from the fact that there is so great a diversity among horns of caribou, both in shape, size, and various peculiarities, to a degree that no two are nearly alike, it is hardly safe to rely upon any one of them for a specific character. Of the horns of Mr. Lee's two males, here shown on the plates, it will be readily seen that not only do they differ widely from each other, but

DROPPED ANTLER FROM KENAI PENINSULA, ALASKA.
Found by H. E. Lee.

also from the antlers of Dr. Allen's type. Failing then to distinguish the Kenai Peninsula caribou as a distinct form by any of the characters mentioned by Dr. Allen, apparently nothing remains but the color, and the unusually dark under parts, and as the skin of the cow does not resemble that of the bull, having both a white belly and caudal patch, we are forced to regard the coloration either as a sexual distinction, or of no consequence. But in order to determine this satisfactorily a considerable number of both sexes will have to be obtained.

Some two years ago, I saw in Seattle a mounted specimen of a bull caribou also from the Kenai Peninsula, and my recollection of it is, a dark animal with horns different again from any here shown, but my memory fails to recall whether or not there was any white on the belly. The caribou of the Kenai Peninsula, evidently like those from other parts of the continent, exhibit a great variety and shape of horns, and it may be doubted if a style can be established so radically different from its very close allies, *R. montanus*, and *R. dawsoni*, as to be able to maintain itself as a separate form, or whether indeed the above named animals in a large series of specimens, could present evidences of such a distinct character that would demonstrate for themselves anything more than a racial difference, and perhaps not even that. Among the known caribou of North America there appear to be three distinct styles of horns. The antlers of the Arctic, or Barren Ground animals and those from Newfoundland are widely different, and these again do not closely resemble those of the Canadian and western animals, the principal difference, however, between antlers of the Newfoundland and Canadian specimens being the much heavier character of the former. But between the antlers of the caribou from the eastern and western portions of the continent, from Nova Scotia westward, there is not the same difference, and a reasonable doubt arises in the mind (the immense individual variation in the form and size of the antlers being known and acknowledged) whether too much stress has not been placed upon variable and insufficient characters, and the number of species of caribou in North America thereby unwarrantably increased. The three styles of antlers from the Kenai Peninsula shown on the plates accompanying this paper differ greatly, the two belonging to Mr. Lee agreeing better in some particulars with each other than either do with Dr. Allen's specimen, and while the "anterior branch" is well developed in both, in neither of them does it resemble that of the example called *R. stonei*, and the main beam has altogether a very different shape, so that if antlers alone were a suffi-

cient character, three different species would be here represented. It is very evident that our knowledge of western and northwestern caribou is very imperfect and unsatisfactory, our material having been altogether insufficient, and while it is the easiest thing in the world to describe specimens as "distinct," it is best to make haste slowly until ample evidence is obtained to establish a fact.

I am greatly indebted to Mr. Lee for the photographs of the animal and separate antler obtained by him in Alaska, and for permission to take descriptions of them.

The plate of *R. stonei* is taken from the half-tone in Dr. Allen's paper.

TYPE OF RANGIFER STONEI.
Am. Mus. Nat. Hist. N. Y. Coll.

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